

Orientation Courses for Migrants in Germany: Between Civic Adult Education and Neoliberal Tendencies

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The European Conference on Education 2020
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Migrants coming to Germany are obliged to take part in ‘integration courses’ to obtain residence titles. The curriculum proclaims these orientation courses as ‘value-based political education’. This paper analyzes the perception of the impact of the courses from the perspective of participants and teachers, focusing on neoliberal fixations in tradition of the ‘Chicago School’ of Economics on efficiency and on ‘forming’ useful citizens as a shift in orientation of civil society. Adult education roots, however, in the ideals of emancipation and the Enlightenment. Political programs of migration and political education as well as the Concept for a Nationwide Orientation Course along applicable legal regulations were examined. The qualitative research design contains a partly standardized empirical survey among participants and tutors of the described orientation courses, based on a documentary analysis concerning the legal regulations and a thematic analysis. The data analysis is carried out with a coding scheme with subcodes in relation to the objectives. The results allow the conclusion that, within the framework of the orientation courses, the rules of the local society are taught, so that the participants are expected just to accept them. Policy analysts argue that the ongoing neoliberalization is a ‘critical juncture’ in times of transformation, which provides risks for individuals and societies, e.g. losing the philosophy of solidarity. Lifelong learning as part of new work in an agile society gets instrumentalized against a humanistic, learner-centered approach. The performance goals and efficiency-trimmed conditions should therefore focus on individual development of the learners.

Keywords: Migration Policy, Neoliberalization, Lifelong Learning, Learner-Centered Approach

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Introduction

Migrants coming to Germany are obliged to take part in 'integration courses' to obtain residence titles. The curriculum proclaims these orientation courses explicitly as 'value-based political education', which contributes to the 'promotion of social participation' and enables 'dealing with one's own life reality' (BAMF, 2017). In that regard, it can already be seen that the service company sets conditions for being part of it and 'examines' the extent to which a contribution to the company can be made. In this respect, the two perspectives are whether the orientation course with the content-giving curriculum on the one hand and the practical implementation of this content on the other hand contribute to the successful cultural integration. Particularly thinking about the latter aspect, it can be analytically determined whether a certain assimilation does not take place when 'mediating' a culture that is foreign, with norms and values as well as behaviors in everyday life (see the assimilation paradigms according to Esser, 2001). In this respect, attitudes and requirements can certainly lead to states of segregation within a society. The link between interculturality and the new forms of work requirements such as creativity and agility will also be examined in terms of a positive effect on integration-promoting potentials among migrants.

The tendencies towards governmental liberalization and efficiency gains have a social impact on the social balance of power and, thus, indirectly on the protection of minorities (Altvater, 1981). State deregulation in social policy promotes social individualism, which is the most important benefit to the upper, established population. This is due to the principle of justice to create a livelihood for the individual, and the economic potentials for the public (Nachtwey, 2008). At the same time, this shifts the importance of social actors such as trade unions, parties, and business associations. This is about a transformation of the state, according to which the order and market regulation function is placed above the social policy function.

Main Perspective

Policy analysts argue that the ongoing neoliberalization of social welfare policy is a 'critical juncture' because it is taking place during a time of transformation, which provides risks for individuals and societies, e.g. losing the philosophy of solidarity. Lifelong learning as part of new work in an agile society is instrumentalized against a humanistic, learner-centered approach. The performance goals and efficiency-trimmed conditions prevent individual development and motivation of the learners and has consequences for the professionalization of tutors working with adults. Changes in social policy reflect the growing influence of the market-oriented philosophy of neoliberalism in the tradition of the Chicago School of Economics in policymaking, with representatives such as Milton Friedman or Joseph Schumpeter. In this context, there is a tendency in the Western industrialized countries that neoliberalization is increasingly developing into the leading logic for public policymaking. This goes hand in hand with a strong change of orientation in civil society, where economic thinking also determines a variety of areas of life: business, organization and association life, family life, and working life. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (1944) criticized the idea of a welfare state that would undermine the autonomy of markets.

Theoretical basics

This leading perspective of government policy and legislation in social science is not free of critics (such as Jürgen Habermas). In particular, the modern sociological system theory, founded by Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann, is based on empirical observation and analysis of the functionality of modern society without neoliberal tendencies. Lifelong learning is a central point of life here, so that pedagogical learning theories such as cognitivism, with representatives such as Kurt Lewin or Jean Piaget, could also be used as a concept for the nationwide integration course.

The concept of neoliberalism is intended to express a transformation of the relationship between the state and the economy, which is reflected in both legislation and political programs. In pure neo-liberal form, the performance and competitive character permeates all areas of society life, if megatrends such as globalization or supranational governance of transnational organizations such as the European Union (EU) are not able to do so. A lack of budgetary power of the municipalities to carry out the local tasks on their own responsibility have an influence on everyday social life (Foucault, 1978).

Therefore, the strategic-relational perspective of the state as a social actor, but also drivers of hegemony concepts (Poulantzas, 1978), are implicitly included, when the crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian welfare state raised the central question of state legitimacy. The concept of 'new constitutionalism' (Gill, 2000) describes the disciplining effect of the neoliberal attitude of political action supported by basic economic values.

The idea of the development of society is based on the general economic idea of 'human capital' (Stewart, 1999) In this respect, the neoliberal paradigm also fits in with the theories of the modern working world. However, the extent to which lateral leadership, open innovation management, and agile working methods in the VUCA world also include the opportunity for the target group of migrants, and how globalization could really be found in the social fabric, the social context of this example. Further research will be carried out.

Concept of culture and intercultural communication

Defining the concept of culture is difficult from a variety of scientific points of view, which is why this work is limited to the capacity for integration or the will of migrants. The culture of a society has a component of constant change and renewal (see Eco, 1977), as well as a static construction of classification standards and recognized rules of conduct, which also includes the consideration of migration and integration.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the theory of assimilation according to Esser was developed, which provided the programmatic basis in the current Federal Republican integration policy. At the same time, Esser points out that in globalized, modern societies there is no need for identification with the nation, but at the level of 'citizenship' principles of 'individual freedom and norms of fairness and democracy' (Esser, 2001). The sense of citizenship is disconnected from the question of national

affiliations, such as a liberal-democratic basic order or allowing pluralized paths of life in the local place of the closer environment. As a critique of Esser's theory of assimilation, the blurring can be attributed, for example, to the factor of attractiveness of an immigration country or the influence of national integration policies on the integration process.

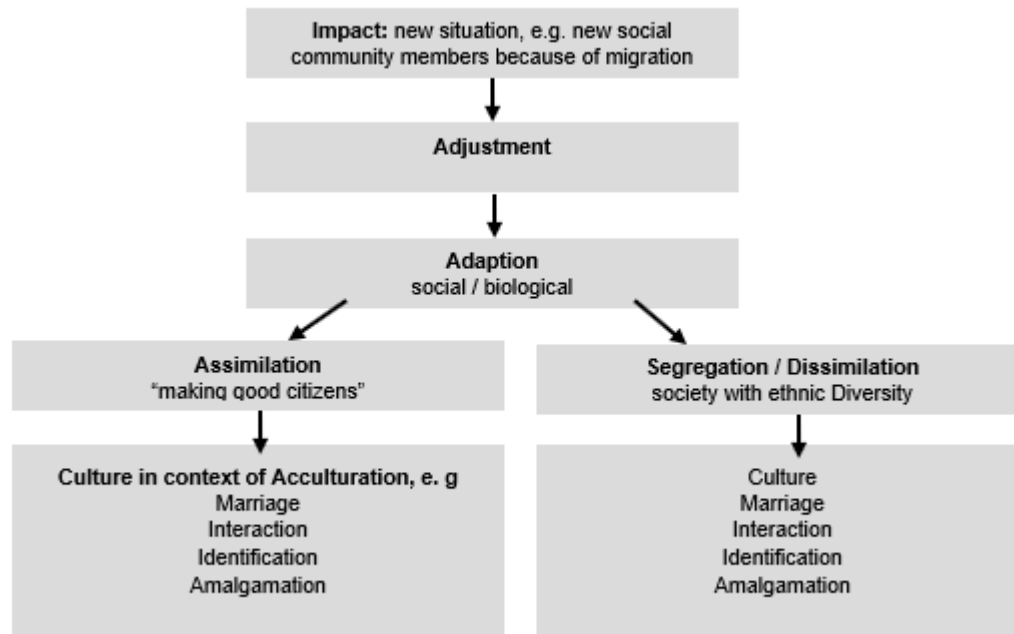


Figure 1: Assimilation Theory according to Esser

The counterpart to the theory of assimilation is the hybrid cultural theory according to Homi K. Bhabha from the field of postcolonial studies, which assumes that there is room for migrants to act in order to influence the host society and enrich the culture found. Bhabha criticizes the mere coexistence of different ethnic groups as an overarching consensus, although division through cultural plurality inevitably takes place, and thus a valuable moment of development is lost. In this respect, there are critical positions on cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination (see Bhabha, 2000).

Specifically, Bhabha speaks of ways of bringing the migrants' experiences into a participatory procedure, for example as an opportunity to enrich the curriculum of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) with intercultural elements. The 'controversy' of political education is defined by content, social importance, and access to education.

Orientation Courses for Migrants in Germany

The influences mentioned so far can particularly be seen in legislation, using the example of immigration policy. Therefore, an overview of the requirements for the integration courses will be given as a specific example of foreseen migration conditions.

The BAMF is a federal agency in the business sector of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), which is responsible for the framework conditions for the

implementation of integration courses. In concrete terms, authorization procedures are also carried out, integration statistics are drawn up, and the authorization and procurement to independent welfare institutions for the implementation of the course units, which in turn take over the function of supervisory authority if participants do not appear in classes.

The holistic requirement of the integration course is to enable immigrants to cope with the affairs of their daily lives without any support. In this respect, the Residence Act differentiates the integration courses, a further development of language skills and knowledge of the current legal system, culture, and history of the Federal Republic of Germany. In addition to topics of everyday interaction in life situations, which are taught through linguistic exercises, listening comprehension and reading comprehension, the focus is above all on the ability to write, e.g. writing letters and dealing with forms.

With regard to the level of language, this objective has to be achieved within 600 lessons (UE) in all-day language lessons (each with 300 hours for the basic and advanced language course) and a further 100 UE of political education in the orientation course. The orientation course concludes with the multiple-choice test 'Leben in Deutschland' (LiD), which checks on cultural integration with a total of 33 questions in a processing time of 60 minutes. The revised new edition concerns the extended orientation course to 100 teaching units (UE) within the modules 'Politics in Democracy', 'History and Responsibility', 'Human and Society' and an excursion.

The basic principles of political education are expressed in the Beutelsbach Consensus, which provides, among other things, for the relation to the world of life and the topicality of these issues. The Beutelsbach Consensus was established in 1976 by the Baden-Württemberg State Centre for Political Education and is a principle for political education. The principles for policy teaching contains the logic of the curriculum for the acquisition of knowledge in the orientation course aiming at the following three general learning objectives:

1. Affective learning objectives to achieve a positive assessment of democracy.
2. Cognitive learning goals rely on a gain of knowledge based on previous experiences, in which everyday situations are classified.
3. Competence development and expansion through case-by-case application of the mediated content.

The focus of the content is the relationship of the individual to the community, in which an open concept of culture is based; intercultural competence and tolerance are the maxim of action. In line with the effort to activate participants, weighing and analyzing options for action within norms and conventions is an example of tolerant and constructive coexistence.

Research design

Based on the previous remarks, empirical consideration is based on a qualitative research design, in which the opinions and assessments of teachers and participants on the integration success of the orientation course were queried. The aim of the study is to show to what extent and under what conditions the students can and may participate in the lessons and to what extent these opportunities are used. In this

context, there may be several factors that may complicate cultural negotiation, which are based on neoliberal influences. Therefore, the focus of this work is that the participation in the orientation course, which is often mentioned in the curriculum of the orientation course and thus also required by BAMF, is subject to restrictions under the given conditions.

Data Sources

The collection of the subjective experiences and perceptions of teachers and participants on the targeted implementation of the instrument orientation course is based on conclusions from the personal assessment of the challenges and needs. The aim is to investigate the competence of the teachers and to take the subjective views on the life-related relationship of the participants, partly already presented in content.

The research data collection group consists of scientifically educated adult trainers and is heterogeneous in terms of teaching experience, gender, and age. The target group of teachers in the orientation course also has varying degrees of prior pedagogical experience. With regards to the participants, only the passing of at least one orientation course was a binding selection criterion. Due to possible language barriers, interpreters supported weaker participants.

Methods

For the implementation of guidance-based focus interviews, a questionnaire was used as a survey tool for both the interviews of the instructors and the participants.

The instructor surveys were conducted with nine teachers in the period from 19. - 26. June 2018. The 25 questions (excluding the biographical questions) revolved around the course content, the methods, conflicts that arose, role interpretation and objectives as well as attitudes and evaluations regarding the course success.

In the interview, the participants were interviewed, and the language skills were also evaluated in an evaluation of a pretest, a leading question with 18 questions in five thematic blocks was created. After the collection of bibliographical data, the topics two to four dealt with the views of the participants and with their learning experiences, the course management as well as with problems, feelings, and the problem of wanting to finish the course prematurely. A total of twelve people (five female and seven male) were interviewed, including the pretest participants, on 1st August 2018. The interviews were conducted parallelly in two rooms, recorded and documented using historical logs. They took between 15 and 30 minutes.

The analytical preparation on basis of the research-leading questions of the data material was based on the method of qualitative text analysis (Mayring, 2015). The systematic analysis of the data material with exploration and structuring has a complexity reducing alignment based on the formation of categorization of empirically collected material. On basis of the discussion guide, categories are formed deductively, but new categories are inductively generated. In the process of category formation, text passages are summarized, paraphrased, and categorized.

Using MaxQDA, Version 18.2, a qualitative data and text analysis system, was able to manage codes and coding, and transfer them into the analysis (Kuckartz, 2014). In this way, three main categories ([1] language as a basic barrier to communication, [2] structural requirements and teaching-learning situation, [3] orientation-providing content and values: What has been learned?) were generated, which are related to each other. Due to the small population of respondents, a generalization of qualitative type formation due to the combination of identified expressions is not representative. Regarding the interview group, the interpretation, however, shows some probability in relation to tendencies to confirm the hypotheses.

Conclusion

The deductively developed hypotheses were mainly confirmed with the survey's statements on commutated level:

1. Qualification of the lecturers only in the language part qualitatively assured – pedagogical competence not tested in political education, which is absolutely recommended! The basic attitude and values of the lecturers are not questioned by BAMF, but these have an implicit effect on the teaching design and expression development of the participants.
2. Indoctrination instead of participatory integration in practice – curriculum provides for methodological diversity but is sustainable
3. Start of the orientation courses is too early in the integration process, since the participants should get to know the political system - the orientation course does not necessarily make sense as a block seminar - rather accompanying to reflect on everyday experiences with a life experience!
4. Qualification level of the participants is not included to determine the level of political experience, e.g. with an entrance test. The level differences in the orientation course have no consequence.
5. Social performance claim is recognizable in implementation and test procedures – individual-related personality formation is not recognizable. Both remain the responsibility of the individual and his or her individual initiative due to the lack of participatory integration.

Based on the answers, these can be inductively extended by two further generalizable findings:

1. A critical reflection of evaluation is missing concerning the further development of the training concept. In the course, attributions of participants initiated by the curriculum are resolved in a structured manner and discussed critically. A success check of the educational institutions must be evaluated concerning intention and meaningfulness to the teaching objectives of the curriculum and be reflected critically.
2. Positive integration performance is only possible due to a further increase in the previously undersized time quota in the orientation course to contribute personality-building measures in the course implementation using situational methodology.

To put it in a nutshell: the framework conditions of the orientation course give little room for cultural negotiation and teaching cultural values in the integration course is more positive if it is an element of participation. This is proved likely, based on the feedback from the interviews on both sides. The willingness to teach in an orientation

course was mainly associated with personal interest in the topics. Most instructors work on a fee basis for the training provider, which often discourages the high level of preparation and often prevents the inclusion of the world of life.

Most respondents - teachers, and participants - see a discrepancy between the requirements of the curriculum and the level of the 'Leben in Deutschland' test. The test does not allow a statement as to the extent to which the participants are prepared for life in Germany, since no attitudes but only knowledge are queried, add several teachers. This fact and the complementary online offers for the test led to 'vacuum learning' on the test questions and not the gain of knowledge, which made the courses less attractive.

Teachers see conflicts primarily due to cultural differences of the participants, and different learning cultures are a challenge. In this respect, further training could be helpful in dealing with these differences, if intercultural competence and pedagogical aptitude, e.g. for the use of different social forms of teachers, would also be specified in the orientation course.

Concerning the question of empowerment, it is entirely clear that a significant proportion of teachers have not yet dealt intensively with this issue. It seems that, therefore, 'social participation' cannot be fulfilled, since the teachers have not developed a concept for implementation.

Cultural characteristics are not considered enough, which can be justified with Esser's theoretical paradigm, to which the Federal Ministry literally endorses. This type of teaching, thus, tends to bear characteristics of knowledge transfer in the style of assimilation, in which knowledge of culture is to be enshrined in the textbook, presented statically, and accepted by migrants. Both in foreign language teaching and particularly in the part of political education (orientation course), the neoliberal consciousness of the state becomes clear on the one hand, on the other hand, the methodological-didactic design and implementation of the concept gives reason for criticism.

Following Bhabha's theories, the orientation course provides a lot of time and space for discussion and encourages the instructors to introduce rather open questions to the group. It would be conceivable, and, according to Bhabha, an opportunity to question every presented circumstance in the most critical way, to compare it to the participants' own cultural experiences. In contrast, according to Esser's theoretical approach, there is less need for discussion and criticism of the existing German system since the focus is on the transfer of knowledge of German customs. Migrants are a minority who have to adapt, to a certain extent, in order to be able to act in everyday life and in their professional life, but Esser's theory is already strongly anchored in the conception of integration courses, that their presence in the classroom are little questioned.

This act of queuing for learned and probably often memorized knowledge in the form of a multiple-choice test is a characteristic of Esser's assessment of integration. The test does not examine the views or opinions of the participants, which Esser himself calls a 'certain 'lead' culture', and the limits of the feasibility of Bhabha's sociological theory. This situation leads to the fact that norms and values, which are to be taught in

the course, are taught more head-on than discursively, which seems to be quite effective from an assimilation point of view. However, either due to the nature of the mediation, the group dynamics or also low due to lack of time, the important element of the negotiation is lost, and the orientation course departs from its objective of the transfer of value.

The qualitative method of empirical design offered the opportunity to take the subjective view of teachers and participants on structural requirements and the concrete teaching design. At the same time, the limitations of this work must be addressed with a lack of validity due to this design, and possible starting points for further research must be identified. However, it is not possible to make an absolute statement about the influence on the mediation of cultural values, practices, and symbols that have been noticed in this research, since a still clearly profound empirical study would be needed. On basis of the above-mentioned aspects of an indoctrinating basic orientation of the state implementation of the requirements from the curriculum, it is necessary to discuss whether a competence-oriented form of communication of everyday-related scenarios of the culture alien to the participants should be pursued.

It is undisputed that the test limits the scope of the questions from the classroom, strengthens a focus on the sample questions during the preparation of the learning, and does not allow room for the participants' own experiences and life-related relationships. In addition, the probability of 25 percentage points on the correct response in rate mode is greatly increased, because incorrect responses are not sanctioned with point reduction. In this respect, there is no structured control of the learning objectives as an implementation of the requirements stated in the curriculum and in the teaching materials on basis of concrete tasks. The design of the structural framework seems to have a significant impact on the sustainability of integration performance, so there is a need for further research.

A world society based on solidarity as a regulatory idea includes the idea of 'readiness for social balance' (Köbler, 2000) and the promotion of the ecological perspective. Accordingly, living conditions must change, triggering conflicting learning and experience processes in one's own society to combat dilemmas of global justice deficits. An important starting point, therefore, is self-criticism and a reflection on the state mechanisms of education. Thus, the challenge for Germany is a development towards an immigration society.

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